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Northern Irish pigs first in EU to catch H1N1

Report Categories:

Livestock and Products

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Report Highlights:

On September 17, 2009, novel H1N1 avian influenza was confirmed in a pig herd in Northern Ireland (NI). Although this is the first confirmation of H1N1 in a European pig herd, cases have previously been reported in Canada, Australia and Argentina. In agreement with the European Commission, precautionary measures have been put in place on the farm but no additional measures have been placed on the movement or sale of NI live animals or meat.

General Information:

On September 17, 2009, the Northern Ireland Government's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) confirmed that a pig herd had tested positive for the novel H1N1 influenza A. Although this is the first confirmation of H1N1 in a European pig herd, cases have previously been reported in Canada, Australia and Argentina and according to DARD the finding was not unexpected given that the virus is circulating in humans.

DARD has informed the European Commission. It concurred with DARD that the culling of infected pig herds

is not recommended and actions should be limited to prohibiting the movement of clinically infected animals for slaughter and containing spread. The Commission did not impose any additional measures on the movements of live animals or meat. Consequently, in addition to instigating surveillance and control measures on the farm, DARD is providing advice to the industry as required and has reminded pig keepers of the (attached) voluntary Code of Practice. Agreed in conjunction with industry and part of DARD's disease contingency planning, it provides guidance on the actions pig keepers should take to reduce the risk of introduction of influenza viruses to pig herds and reduce the risk of onward spread if introduction does occur.

The UK Government's Food Standards Agency has re-iterated its advice to consumers that novel H1N1 influenza A does not pose a food safety risk to consumers. This is in line with the advice from the OIE, WHO and FAO who all maintain that pork and pork products handled in accordance with hygienic practices, complying with international standards, are not a source of infection.

At the consumer level, trade sources do not anticipate that this discovery will have any impact on the demand for pork products in Northern Ireland. Further, industry sources indicate that should the pigs involved make a full recovery, which is expected, then the only impact on the affected farm will be that the pigs will take two to three weeks longer to mature.

Most exports of Northern Irish pork, bacon and live animals remain within the EU. About 2,000 MT of pork ribs are exported to the U.S. each year.